

The Glory of the Story

The New Birth Part 7

1 Peter 1:10-12 5-13-2012

Summary: The prophets searched Scripture to find out what kind of era it would be when the Messiah would suffer and then be glorified. But they were told that it was not for them to know. We get to participate in this glorious kingdom in the Church (why would a Christian prefer the world to the Church?). The angels are preoccupied with our salvation but not hell (probably because they see the glory of God, so forgiveness is more outrageous than hell). The Spirit is preoccupied because of the glory of His plan (a ruined redeemed creation is better than one that was never ruined).

Introduction	1
Why Were the Prophets So Fascinated? A Dying Deliverer	2
The Glory of the Story	2
A Different Kind of Era	4
What is Better About Our Covenant? Greater Access to God	5
The Church Age is Glorious.....	5
Two Comings.....	5
Are You Participating in the Glorious Messianic Age?.....	5
Why Are the Angels So Fascinated? The Problem of Patience	7
The Problem of Grace	8
Why is God so Fascinated? Ruin and Redemption.....	8
Why the Messianic Sufferings.....	8
<i>The Problem of Suffering for Christianity.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Problem of Evil for the Atheist.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Answer is NOT that He Does not Care (He Suffered).....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Answer is Not Lack of Power.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Answer: Redeemed is Better</i>	<i>10</i>
Better to Lose and Regain Than to Never Lose.....	10
1:25 Questions.....	10

1 Peter 1:10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Introduction

Today is the seventh sermon on the book of 1 Peter, and we still have not gotten to a single command. The first imperative in the book will not come until next week, when we hit verse 13. All these first twelve verses that we have been studying have just been a celebration of the wonders of our salvation. It is one, giant sentence where Peter says, “Praise God who has given us new birth into a living hope and into a glorious inheritance. It’s an inheritance that is so marvelous that it brings us inexpressible and glorious joy just to contemplate it – even though we are going through all kinds of terrible suffering. All that suffering does is prove and strengthen our faith, which gives us even greater access to the wonders of this amazing salvation.” And even after all that, Peter still isn’t done. Before he gets to that first command he wants to say a few more things about the glorious wonders of how amazing this grace really is. And he does it in a very intriguing way. He is going to show us how three different parties were fascinated and preoccupied with this salvation. The first is the Old Testament prophets.

Why Were the Prophets So Fascinated? A Dying Deliverer

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care

Searched what? Their own writings and the writing of the other prophets. In other words – the Old Testament Scriptures. They searched the Scriptures to attempt to find answers about this amazing salvation.

Sometimes people use this passage to try to suggest that the prophets did not understand their own writings. They scribbled something down, looked at it, and could not make heads or tails out of it. Or they thought they were writing about their day, and it turned out it was a prophecy of the Messiah and they did not even know it. That is not what Peter says. They understood perfectly what they had written.¹ The prophets knew that what they were writing was the Word of God, and that it was coming from the Holy Spirit. They knew when they were writing about the Messiah, and they knew that portions of what they were writing was for a later generation. The only thing they did not know was the time and circumstances of the fulfillment.

10 ... searched intently and with the greatest care 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ ...It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you...

God was showing them portions of the end of the novel and they were saying, “We want to know what happens in the surrounding chapters.”

The Glory of the Story

It is important to understand that the Bible is not just a giant collection of random religious sayings. It has a very definite story line with a clear beginning and a plot and a clear conclusion. It covers the whole life span of this world. And it does not just describe the history, but it reveals the meaning and purpose of everything that happens. It is all going somewhere, and the Holy Spirit showed the prophets some snapshots of the end of this glorious story. And they were blown away. They wanted to know the circumstances in which those snapshots would take place – especially since some of the snapshots seem contradictory.

Here is that part of the story they knew: First, God creates a perfect world. Then mankind sins, and that sin provokes God’s curse, and that ruins everything. From that time on mankind plunges in a freefall toward absolute, unmixed wickedness, and God ends up destroying the entire human race in a flood. The only exception is the family of Noah, who were the only righteous people left in the world.

¹ Here at Agape we strongly believe that every passage of Scripture means only what the human author meant to communicate when he wrote it. That is what it means, and that is all it will ever mean – nothing else. If you want to know what a passage means, just study the context until you can discern what the original author was trying to communicate to the original readers, and that is the meaning of the text – nothing else. That meaning never changes. A passage can never mean what it never meant.

Suppose you see me one day after a really hard day and ask me how I am doing and I say, “Man, today was the longest day of my life.” What does that mean? Obviously I don’t mean that literally. All it means is that it was an especially difficult day that seemed to go on and on. That is what I intended to communicate. Now, is it possible that ten years after I die you could look back at what I said and find out that now my words mean something different? And twenty years later something else? No. That statement will always mean whatever I meant to communicate when I said it, and nothing else. If years later someone interprets it to mean something else, that does not mean the meaning changed. It just means the person is misinterpreting the meaning.

God’s Word is no different. It can never mean what it never meant. Whatever the writer meant to communicate is what it means and nothing else. If the writer meant to say something about the coming Messiah, that is what he meant. If he did not mean to communicate anything about the coming Messiah, then that verse will never be about the Messiah – even if it seems to be a good fit. We call that the principle of “authorial intent” – whatever the author intended is what it means.

This is an extremely important principle, because without it Scripture can mean anything. If meanings can change, then someone could say, “Yes, originally the Bible taught that Jesus is God, but now the meaning has changed and it’s teaching that Jesus isn’t God.” If the meaning can change, then we have no way of knowing at any particular time what the meaning actually is.

That shows what happens to humanity without a preserving, redeeming influence. So then the human race starts all over with Noah, and this time God promises not to let it go down the toilet like that again. So how does He fulfill that promise? He calls a man by the name of Abraham and promises to make his offspring into a nation that will have God's special blessing – the nation of Israel. This nation will serve as a pipeline of grace that will keep humanity from freefalling into wickedness again.

Through that nation God gives the Bible, which reveals what God is like and what His will is. Not only that, but through that nation, Israel, God promises to redeem the whole world, and to reverse all the damage that was done in the Fall and the curse. Through them God will eliminate evil altogether, and bring about a new age where there will be no suffering and no sin.

How is that going to work? How is God going to fix all the problems in the world and eliminate evil and provide forgiveness of sins and salvation for all who will receive it through a tiny little people group in a sliver of land in the Mideast? Is it going to happen through some military effort or political effort or social program? How is it going to happen? In the fourth book of the Bible we get a clue.

Numbers 24:17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab

A king will someday arise in Israel who will crush Israel's enemies. So it is going to happen through an individual. All these things God is going to accomplish through Israel will be finally accomplished through a particular leader in Israel. And that leader will not only be a king; he will also be a great prophet.

Deuteronomy 18:15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers.

So right from the start God hinted that all these marvelous things that will be accomplished through Israel, will be accomplished through a particular man who will come from Israel, and He will be both a king and a prophet. He will be like David and Moses, but even greater. In fact, the later prophets make it clear that this Prophet/King will actually be God Himself. He will be deity. In Daniel 7 it says that even though He looks like a son of man (fully human), He can do something no other human could ever do. He can approach the Ancient of Days.

Daniel 7:13 In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

This Prophet/King will rise up out of the tribe of Judah and the family of David and He will be the one who will fulfill all the amazing things that were to come through Israel - reverse the curse and redeem this world and eliminate evil and bring about salvation to all who believe.

So far that makes pretty good sense. But then comes the prophet Isaiah, and tells us something about this coming King that really throws everyone for a loop. He is speaking about this great descendent of David (he calls Him a Branch of David's tree), and he says this...

Isaiah 52:13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- 15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. ... 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought

us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This great, glorious Prophet/King will be a suffering servant. In fact, not only will He suffer – He will die.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

This awesome, powerful, glorious, conquering deliverer would be a servant who would suffer and die. That is very clear. Anyone who did not know that the Messiah would come and suffer and die just was not paying attention. After Jesus' resurrection He encountered some of His followers who were all upset because the tomb was empty on the third day, and they didn't know what to make of it.

Luke 24:25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

What those men on the road to Emmaus did not understand because of reluctance to believe, the Old Testament prophets understood just fine: the conquering, Messiah would also, somehow, be a suffering, dying servant. So they wanted to know, under what kind of circumstances can you have a dying deliverer?

Well, did they ever get their answer? No.

12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you

What they so longed to find, they were not given. But we have!

Luke 10:23 Jesus turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

They said, "God, show us the full glory of the story" and God said, "No, that's not for you to see."

A Different Kind of Era

They were not allowed to see the full glory of the story. But here is what they did know: They knew it would be a whole different kind of time – a different era. Literally the phrase is "**what kind of time and what circumstances.**"² And the word for time here is the word used for an epoch or era. It is not that they were looking for a date. They just wanted to know, "What sort of age would this be?"

² See Jobes for a helpful discussion of how to translate this phrase.

What would the circumstances be like? What would it be like to live in this era where the Messiah would arrive and be revealed and suffer and then be glorified?"

What is Better About Our Covenant? Greater Access to God

They knew it would be a different kind of era – and here is another thing they knew: They knew there would actually be a New Covenant. Israel's privileged status with God throughout their entire history was always based on a covenant with God. But when this new, glorious, Messianic age arrived, there would be a New Covenant.

And one of the main features of this New Covenant would be that God's people would have greater access to His presence. There would be a much closer relationship between God and His people.

The Old Testament saints were saved by grace just like us. The Old Testament saints had full forgiveness of sins, just like us. The Old Testament saints knew God personally. They could receive strength and refuge and peace and comfort and joy and guidance from God. The Old Testament saints could offer God acceptable worship. The difference is in our ability to draw near to God. They could draw near to Him to an extent, but there was a lot of "this far and no farther" in their time. The presence of God was primarily in the Temple. It was available in a very limited way elsewhere, but for the most part if you wanted a great experience of the presence of God you had to physically travel to the Temple. And the Temple was made up of various courts that approached closer and closer to the Holy of holies where God dwelt. And depending on who you were, you could advance as far as your particular court and no farther. And no group was allowed all the way into the Holy of holies.

And when they did approach as far as they could, their interactions with God were mediated by a human priest, who was a go-between between them and God. And that was a problem, because that human priest was himself a sinner with all kinds of human limitations.

Also, the Jewish nation as a whole was considered the son of God, but individual saints were not sons and daughters of God. They did not have that kind of father-child relationship with Him like we do. They could not address Him as Abba, like we can. And on top of that, they had the Holy Spirit *with* them, but not *in* them like we do. Our closeness with the Holy Spirit is greater than theirs was. All those are aspects of this New Covenant and this better epoch or era.

The Church Age is Glorious

So their two big questions were: How can you have a dying deliverer? What kind of era will that be? They searched diligently to discover the answers to those questions. The language is very strong – they got out the scrolls and really studied long and hard. And they came up empty. They found no answers because it was not revealed to them. But what they desired so desperately to know about, we not only know about it, but we are living in it!

Two Comings

We understand question #1. How can you have a dying deliverer? Easy – the Messiah comes twice. The first time to suffer and die and rise from the dead. Then a second time to bring about the culmination of all human history and the end of all things. And in between that first coming and Second Coming there is a period of overlap – where we have elements of this present age and elements of the age to come. And during this period, the community of believers enters into and actually undergoes the sufferings of the Messiah. We are so identified with Him that we must undergo His sufferings to enter the kingdom.

Are You Participating in the Glorious Messianic Age?

What about the second question? What sort of time or era would this be? What is it like to live in great kingdom that Jesus preached about? If you want to know the answer to that – just look around.

We are living in the Church age. The Church age is an era where the age to come is breaking in to this present age. If you want to see this present age – it is still around. Just go out into the world and you will see it.

If you want to see glimpses of the age to come, that can be found in the Church, among the saints. Wherever the saints are gathered, there you can experience foretastes and previews of the glorious age to come. That is where you can actually participate in the kingdom of the Messiah here and now!

Do you realize, nobody in the history of the world ever had it as good as you?

Matthew 11:11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

You have it better than everyone who has ever lived prior to the cross – all because you live in the Church age. Look at how Peter describes it.

10 the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently...

The Church is a place of spectacular grace from God. Was there grace in the Old Testament? Absolutely. God was just as gracious then as He is now. God is not in process, He is not evolving or developing or growing or changing. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He was incredibly gracious in Old Testament times – so much so that it was actually maddening to some of His people. He called Jonah to go preach a message of judgment and condemnation on a wicked people and Jonah refused to do it, because he knew God well enough to know that if those people heard the message and repented God would forgive them at the drop of a hat. God was so gracious that sometimes His people felt like they could not count on Him to carry out justice on evil men. So there was plenty of grace in the Old Testament, but the Prophets knew that there was coming a time when a much greater outpouring of grace would come – grace that would create a people who are genuinely repentant over their sin and who deeply, genuinely love God.

Zechariah 12:10 And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

It is an amazing thing to be part of a whole community of repentant people. That is why it always amazes me when someone claims to be a Christian and has no interest in church. How could you love the Messiah and have no interest in the central headquarters of His kingdom? How could you love the presence of God and have no desire to be in the place where the greatest experience of the presence of God is available? How could you be a recipient of this greater grace, and not be drawn to the place where the greatest experience of that grace is available?

I do not understand how a person can be a Christian and not love the Church.

“But Darrell, don’t you realize that some people have been hurt really bad in churches?”

Of course I understand that. I have been hurt bad. The greatest suffering I have ever experienced in my life was inflicted on me by people in church. I have been lied to, lied about, mistreated, gossiped about, slandered, ignored, mocked, shut out, kicked out – you name it. I have suffered quite a bit at the hands of the saints of God in the Church. I understand all about that. But do you know what my response is to all that? So what? So I got hurt – so what? What does that have to do with anything? The Church is the household of the living God. I love God. I want to be in His house. The Church is the body of Christ – I want to be part of the functioning of His body. The Church is the Temple of the Spirit. I want to enter in to the Temple and draw near to God. The Church is the outpost in this universe where grace from God flows most readily. I want that grace. It is where the saints gather – I love the saints. It is where the children of God come to honor the Lord Jesus Christ and shout His praises with unanimous love for Him – I would not miss that for the world. The world mocks Him and ignores Him and dishonors Him. I want to be where He is praised, not where He is mocked.

So is there pain involved? Of course. Will people in the church hurt me? Of course. But so what? Where else am I going to go – to the world? If I have to suffer to be here, so be it. The prophets and great men of old longed just to know what the Church would be like. The angels lean over the banister of heaven to take it in. The Holy Spirit made it His focus for thousands of years ahead of time in preparation. And now it is available to me! I would walk across hot coals to be in the household of God.

The prophets would walk across coals just to get a glimpse of it. One Old Testament prophet did get a glimpse. Simeon, in his old age, saw the baby Jesus in the Temple and said,

Luke 2:29 Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation

If Simeon had died one day before that he would not have died in peace. But now, even though he still had not seen all the glorious things Jesus would do, it was enough for him to just see that Jesus had been born and the time of the Messiah had begun.

Why Are the Angels So Fascinated? The Problem of Patience

OK, so why were the prophets so fascinated? They could not imagine what the era of a dying deliverer would be like. But the prophets are not the only ones in this passage who are amazed over our salvation. Look at the end of verse 12.

12 ... Even angels long to look into these things.

When you are a kid, you think, “Wouldn’t it be cool to be an angel?” You could fly, no sin, you get to live in heaven. But the angels are spending their time thinking, “I wonder what it would be like to be a saint.” Of all the amazing things the angels have to look into in heaven, they want to look at what God is doing in the Church. Why? I have to admit – I struggle with this. I know I should be bowled over and amazed and astounded and shouting for joy over my salvation. But the reality is – this salvation is all I have ever known. I have been a believer since before I can remember – I grew up in the church. And it is hard to be amazed over something like that. That was my excuse, but the reason that excuse does not even begin to fly is this: The angels have been looking into it for thousands of years, and in the book of Revelation they are still floored by it.

How is it that they are so fascinated? As I was contemplating that this week, it occurred to me that as amazed as they are over our salvation, one thing it never says they are amazed at is hell – which is a huge problem for us. A friend of mine has been on staff at his church for years and is now having doubts about the faith because of the doctrine of eternal, conscious torment in hell. Why don’t the angels struggle with that? Do they lack compassion?

Think about this for a minute – we see redemption, and it is no big deal. We see hell and we are shocked. The angels see hell and it makes perfect sense to them. They see our salvation and they are shocked. Why do you suppose that is? Could it be that it is because they stand in the presence of the glory of God? They have so much more understanding into His greatness than we do. So when they see a creature rebel against that great God, and they see God’s name dishonored, eternal hell makes perfect sense. They can see the greatness of God, and so they understand the magnitude of the punishment we deserve for dishonoring God. So hell makes sense to them. Forgiveness and salvation knock the wind out of them.

But we have such a small view of God’s glory and worthiness that dishonoring Him does not seem like it deserves all that much punishment. So hell seems extreme and excessive, and forgiveness seems reasonable. Oh, that we might gain a greater view of God’s glory that we might understand the wonder of our own salvation!

The Problem of Grace

The angels marvel at redemption because they appreciate the glory of the story of mankind. For centuries, God's forgiveness did not make any sense. God was forgiving sins and letting wicked men off scot-free. Only horrible, unjust judges do that. While we think the big question is the "problem of evil" – in heaven among the angels the big question was the problem of forgiveness. The problem of grace. The problem of patience. It was inexplicable. It was a mystery. How can God overlook such evil and wickedness? How can He deal gently and patiently with treasonous rebels who dishonor His name? How can such injustice flow from the perfect Judge? It made no sense – until Jesus came and bore the full wrath of God in our place, paying the debt we owed for our sin. Why are the angels so fascinated with the gospel? It solves the 4000-year problem of patience.

That is why in Revelation 5, when the angels praise God, instead of singing about their own experience with God in heaven they chime in on the song of redemption even though they have never been redeemed. Even though they have enjoyed the bliss of heaven for thousands of years, they do not sing about that. They sing praises to God for redeeming men because they can see the full glory of the story and there is nothing greater to sing about than that.

Why is God so Fascinated? Ruin and Redemption

Why are the prophets preoccupied with our salvation? It answers the question of a dying deliverer. Why are the angels preoccupied with our salvation? It solves the age-old problem of patience. But there is one more person in this text who seems to be preoccupied with our salvation. Can you see who it is?

It is the only other person mentioned in the text. Think about it - who was it who wrote this glorious story in the first place?

11 [the Prophets were] trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he bore witness to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Why the Messianic Sufferings?

All of Scripture points to this salvation. And who is the Author of Scripture? The Holy Spirit. And look at verse 12. Who empowers modern day preachers to preach this gospel? Who is it who is empowering me right now so that this gospel makes sense to you and delights and motivates you?

12 ... those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

It is not just the prophets and the angels who are enthralled with this glorious story – it is also God Himself!

Have you ever wondered – why this big, elaborate story? Creation – the flood – Babel – Israel – captivity in Egypt – deliverance – the Judges – the Kings – the divided kingdom – the exile – the restoration – the cross – the Church age – the Second Coming – the Judgment – the age to come – thousands of years of complex history.

Why not just keep it simple? Create a perfect world with no sin or evil, make sure there is no possibility of sin and evil ever, and then just get on with eternity? Why the whole ordeal of the Fall and the curse and sickness and suffering and death and then promise and faith and then a first coming and a Church age and a Second Coming and a judgment and all these countless details? If I came up with a plan for a perfect world, and I had unlimited power, my Bible would be one verse. "In the beginning Darrell created a perfect world – the end." Why did God do it this way? And why the suffering? Why does the Messiah have to suffer, and why do we have to suffer?

The Problem of Suffering for Christianity

What do we say about the problem of suffering and evil? Suffering is probably the most-often used argument against the existence of God. People say, “There’s no way there could be an all-powerful, good God, because if He’s all-powerful, and He allows suffering and evil, He’s clearly not good. And if He’s good, and evil exists, He’s clearly not all-powerful because if He were both all-powerful and good, there would be no evil.” That is one of the most common excuses people use for atheism.

The Problem of Evil for the Atheist

But that excuse does not work because the existence of evil is a bigger problem for the atheist than it is for the Christian. Much bigger. Because if there is no God, there is no basis for claiming *anything* is evil. If there is no God, then all there is is nature. And if all there is is nature, then why would we say violence or suffering are bad? Violence and suffering are perfectly natural. According to evolutionism, that is how we got here. That is how everything improves – by the strong eliminating the weak. And if there is no God, then there is no basis for saying there is anything wrong with the natural order of violence. You may have personal feelings that something is evil or wrong or unjust, but that is all it is. It is just a personal feeling, so you have no basis for imposing it on anyone else. On what possible basis could you object to the natural order of violence?

And yet – everyone knows there is such a thing as evil. Everyone knows things are not as they should be. No matter what people claim to believe, they know some things are just plain wrong.

So if you want to explain the problem of evil, getting rid of God will not help. So what will help? What is the answer to the problem of evil? Why did God ever allow the Fall to take place? Why not create an incorruptible world in which sin is not a possibility?

The Answer is NOT that He Does not Care (He Suffered)

Well, I can tell you what the answer is not. One answer that cannot possibly be true is this one: That God allowed evil because He doesn’t care. We know that, because He Himself entered into all this suffering. Look at what the prophets were so amazed about:

11 the sufferings of Christ

Jesus Christ suffered and died. We know it is not a situation where God sits in heaven and says, “Oh, look at all that suffering down there. Oh well – I don’t care. I’m above it all up here.” No – He suffered the worst of it – voluntarily. He knows exactly what it is like to go through the agony that you have gone through. So one option that we can throw out as a complete non-possibility is that God is somehow indifferent about our suffering.

The Answer is Not Lack of Power

Another non-possibility is that God lacks the power to fix things. We know that cannot be the explanation because first of all, God created the universe. We know from science that matter cannot be eternal, so the universe has not always existed. And we know it could not have created itself out of nothing, because nothingness has no power, because it is nothing. If it had power to create, it would be something. So if there were ever a time when there was nothing at all, then there never could be anything. So we know there has to be a Creator.

Secondly, not only did God create the universe – He also raised Jesus from the dead. So God has awesome, unfathomable, unlimited power in both the natural realm and the spiritual realm. And He has shown that He is perfectly capable of eliminating death.

The Answer: Redeemed is Better

So if it is not indifference, and it is not lack of power – what is it? If God is all-powerful and perfectly good and loving, why did He allow evil and sin and suffering and death? The answer is obvious – He allowed evil because that was best. God only does what is best, right? He never does anything less than best – why would He? He has unlimited power and goodness and wisdom and knowledge, so why would He ever do anything that is not best? By definition – if there is a God, He only does what is best.

So God did it this way because that is best. A ruined and redeemed creation is better than one that was never ruined. Why is it better? I don't know for sure, but I think we can make some pretty good guesses. For one thing, since the greatest thing that can ever happen to a person is to see the glory of God – to see His attributes – a ruined and then redeemed world is better because it puts more of God's attributes on display. That is why the angels are so fascinated with our salvation. Because there is nothing in heaven better for them to spend their time looking into. There is nothing more amazing, because nothing puts more of God's glory on display. The reason the angels chime in on the song of our redemption is because they have never been redeemed. They have never been forgiven. They have never experienced God's mercy from the slime-pit of guilt. They have never experienced God's compassion in times of searing pain. They have never experienced God's patience after a period of hard-heartedness. So many wonderful, marvelous things about God that they have never personally experienced, and if it were not for us and our sin, those aspects of God's glory would not be visible at all.

Better to Lose and Regain Than to Never Lose

The presence of evil has a way of clarifying how wonderful good really is. I heard a man describe a dream he had in which everyone in his family was slaughtered – then he woke up. He said it was so realistic that when he woke up he was emotionally devastated. Then when he got up and saw his wife and kids all perfectly OK, he said he could not even look at them without crying tears of joy. Did he appreciate his family the day before that happened? Sure – but his delight in them was one hundred times greater after having lost them and then getting them back, as it were. A ruined, then redeemed; cursed, and then glorified creation where evil arose, dominated, and then was defeated and eliminated – is far greater than a world where half the attributes of God are forever unknown.

Why is God so preoccupied with the gospel? Because He is the Author of the glory of the story of our salvation. The gospel is the climax of a story that has been developing and building for thousands of years. The stage that you and I are standing on right now has had an audience from the beginning of time. The angels are in the audience; the great prophets of old saw the previews but could not get tickets, and God Himself is the writer and director.

Well, how should we respond to so great a salvation? It is right there in the next verse.

13 Therefore, having prepared your minds for action; being sober; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Benediction: Acts 20:32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1:25 Questions

1. Are you fully participating in the glory of this era (the Church)? Can you see any point at which you believe the Lord would have you increase your participation? What is preventing greater participation?

2. Do you love the Church? What stands in the way of your loving the Church more (that is in your power to change)?
3. Do you have any thought processes that tend to diminish the wonder of your salvation, rather than elevating it?